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STATE PASS TO AID

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Developments in the Middle East situation continues to dominate lead reporting over the past few days. Over the weekend, May 10-12, front-page news reports on the end of the Church of the Nativity crisis and on the end of Arafat's siege. Newspapers also highlight King Abdullah's visit to the United States, featuring extensive coverage of his remarks and his meetings there. Other stories highlight the Sharm El-Sheik summit meeting and its final decision against "all forms of violence". Although the majority of editorial commentaries view the outcome of the summit as a "push for peace" and a show of Arab support and willingness for peace, some argue that the main issue is the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the Palestinian right of resistance.

Editorial Commentaries

-- "Rejecting all forms of violence"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (05/14): "Evidently, American pressures are no longer focused against the Palestinian National Authority, but also against the moderate Arab countries, who are expected to have a role in putting a stop to the martyrdom operations. According to the Sharm El-Sheik summit's final statement, rejecting all forms of violence is the only way to resume the peace process. This is true. However, the confrontations [between the Palestinians and the Israelis] are not happening because of the martyrdom operations, but as a result of Israel's barbaric of extermination, and the Palestinians have not choice but to respond. Another point to be taken into consideration is the fact that the continuation of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is the peak of aggression and the ultimate action of terror."

-- "Why martyrdom operations?"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (05/14): "Here goes the Arab official statements rejecting the martyrdom operations under American pressures. The question is why this viscous American attack against martyrdom operation in particular? It proves that these operations are the strongest weapons in the hands of the Palestinians, and that its acceptability among the young Palestinian men and its development could turn into a real victory against the Hebrew state. Washington, concerned for Israeli interests, wants to rob the Palestinians of their strongest weapon, a weapon that can abolish the occupation. Unfortunately, in their moment of weakness, the Arabs are going along with what Washington wants, only to make the task of the martyrs more difficult."

-- "The Arab movement towards peace"

Daily columnist Bateer Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (05/13): "In general, the objectives of the current Arab political movement are crystal clear. There is great enthusiasm among the Arab countries to play the leadership role in times of quiet and peace. Yet, this enthusiasm disappears completely in times of crises and the Arab countries become silent. There is an Arab move towards peace under the motto of 'let bygones be bygones'. There is no move to make Sharon to pay for his crimes. In fact, this disregard for the complete destruction that befell the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people is aggravating

and infuriating."
GNEHM